

Vermont - Conservation Security Program

General Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment for Tier III

Answers to the following questions will help determine if potentially eligible land satisfies NRCS quality criteria for wildlife habitat. The number of assessments to be completed will depend on the variety of eligible land uses present and the presence of adjacent riparian and wetland resources under the applicant's control.

A combination of positive and negative answers may be required to be eligible, so please carefully read each question prior to checking either "Yes" or "No" or, where available and appropriate, "NA" when a question is not-applicable.

SECTION I - Eligible Land	Yes	No
Is Cropland to be enrolled? - if "Yes" for corn, soybeans, small grains, or truck crops proceed to the self assessment at the top of page 2 - if "Yes" for a Sugarbush then proceed to self assessment at the bottom of page 5	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Are Vineyards or Orchards (including Christmas trees) to be enrolled? - if "Yes" proceed to the self assessment on the bottom of page 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are Pastureland and/or Hayland to be enrolled? - if "Yes", proceed to the self assessments on page 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SECTION II - Incidental Land	Yes	No
1) Does an intermittent and/or perennial stream or riparian buffer exist in or share a border with land to be enrolled? If adjacent buffer is 2 active channel widths or 35 feet wide, whichever is greater, answer no. - if "Yes" proceed to the self assessment on the top of page 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Does a forest (not including riparian forest, hedgerows or treed windbreaks) of at least one acre exist within or share a border with land to be enrolled? - if "Yes" proceed to the self assessment on the bottom of page 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) Does a wetland of at least one acre exist within or share a border with land to be enrolled? - if "Yes" proceed to the self assessment on the top of page 5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SECTION III - Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species	Yes	No
1) Are there any rare, threatened or endangered plant or animal species on the operation? Consult with NRCS office. -if "Yes" proceed to the self assessment on the top of page 6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment: Cropland

Answers to the following questions will help determine if cropland satisfies NRCS quality criteria for wildlife habitat. The condition questions apply to all crop fields.

Condition	Yes	No
1) Is all cropland managed with a fall cover crop (including small grains) with greater than 10% of soil surface covered with live crop, <u>or</u> , 10% covered with crop residue during winter? <i>Note: If no-till or minimum till practices are used, the answer is "Yes".</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) In all crop fields, are there wildlife cover areas within the field or bordering that have all the following characteristics:		
(a) Areas of grass, old fields, trees and shrubs, wetlands, riparian buffers, or others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) At least 30 feet wide and represent 2.5% of the cropland area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Not disturbed (mowed, pastured, etc.) from April 15 th -August 1?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) From the middle of a crop field, is there more than 500 feet to the nearest cover that meets conditions as described in question number 2 above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) If any lakes, ponds, or wetlands (an acre or larger) are present in or bordering your cropland, are they protected from degradation (uncontrolled livestock access, leachate or manure runoff, etc.) with some buffers and little impact to water quality or natural vegetation (species, height and density)? <i>Note: If no such habitat exists, check the N/A box ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/></i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) Are any crop fields, 10 acres or larger, in continuous row crops? If cover requirements in question 2 (above) are met on all crop fields, answer No.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment: Orchards/Vineyards

Answers to the following questions will help determine if orchards and vineyards satisfy NRCS quality criteria for wildlife habitat. The condition questions apply to all orchards and vineyards.

Condition	Yes	No
1) Is the ground cover composed of a least 3 herbaceous species (e.g., grasses, forbs, legumes) and maintained at heights greater than 6 inches during the growing season?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Does management result in occasional mowing (0-2 cuts a year) between April 15 and August 1?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) In all fields, are there wildlife cover areas within the field or bordering that have all the following characteristics:		
(a) Areas of grass, old fields, trees and shrubs, wetlands, riparian buffers, or others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) At least 30 feet wide and represent 2.5% of the cropland area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Not disturbed (mowed, pastured, etc.) from April 15 th -August 1?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) From the middle of an orchard, is there more than 500 feet to the nearest cover that meets conditions as described in question number 3 above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) If any lakes, ponds, or wetlands (an acre or larger) are present in or bordering your orchards, are they protected from degradation (uncontrolled livestock access, leachate or manure runoff, etc.) with some buffers and little impact to water quality or natural vegetation (species, height and density)? <i>Note: If no such habitat exists, check the N/A box ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/></i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment: Pastureland

Answers to the following questions will help determine if pastureland satisfies NRCS quality criteria for wildlife habitat. The condition questions apply to all fields in Pasture.

Condition	Yes	No
1) Are all pastures composed of a mixture of 3 or more herbaceous species (e.g., grasses, forbs, legumes)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) In all pastures, does grazing management result in average grass heights of six inches or greater?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) In all pastures, are there wildlife cover areas within the field or bordering that have all the following characteristics:		
(a) Areas of grass, old fields, trees and shrubs, wetlands, riparian buffers, or others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) At least 30 feet wide and represent 2.5% of the cropland area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Not disturbed (mowed, pastured, etc.) from April 15 th -August 1?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) From the middle of a pasture, is there more than 500 feet to the nearest cover that meets conditions as described in question number 3 above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) If any lakes, ponds, or wetlands (an acre or larger) are present in or bordering your pasture land, are they protected from degradation (uncontrolled livestock access, leachate or manure runoff, etc.) with some buffers and little impact to water quality or natural vegetation (species, height and density)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Note: If no such habitat exists, check the N/A box ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/>		

Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment: Hayland

Answers to the following questions will help determine if hayland satisfies NRCS quality criteria for wildlife habitat. The condition questions apply to all Hay fields.

Condition	Yes	No
1) Are all hayfields composed of a mixture of 3 or more herbaceous species (e.g., grasses, forbs, legumes)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) In all hayfields, does management result in occasional mowing (0-2 cuts a year) between April 15 and August 1?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) In all hayfields, are there wildlife cover areas within the field or bordering that have all the following characteristics:		
(a) Areas of grass, old fields, trees and shrubs, wetlands, riparian buffers, or others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) At least 30 feet wide and represent 2.5% of the cropland area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Not disturbed (mowed, pastured, etc.) from April 15 th -August 1?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) From the middle of a hayfield, is there more than 500 feet to the nearest cover that meets conditions as described in question number 3 above?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) If any lakes, ponds, or wetlands (an acre or larger) are present in or bordering your hayland, are they protected from degradation (uncontrolled livestock access, leachate or manure runoff, etc.) with some buffers and little impact to water quality or natural vegetation (species, height and density)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Note: If no such habitat exists, check the N/A box ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/>		

Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment: Stream/Riparian

Answers to the following questions will help determine if stream and riparian buffers satisfy NRCS quality criteria for wildlife habitat and minimum Tier III requirements for riparian corridors. The condition questions apply to all streams and riparian buffers.

Condition	Yes	No	NA
1) Channel Condition: Although stream channels of lands being proposed for enrollment may have been altered in the past, have you discontinued straightening, dredging or other channel disturbances and are any dikes or levees set back to allow stream flows to inundate floodplains during high flows?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Riparian Zone: Does the natural vegetation (usually trees and shrubs) extend away from the streambank at least one-half of the width of the channel or 35 feet, whichever is greater? Buffers adjacent to erosive areas such as tilled crop land must have an additional 15 foot grass filter strip. Minimum tree density is 200 per acre.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) Bank Stability: Are two-thirds of the stream banks moderately stable, at an elevation generally close to that of the natural floodplain and with little or only minor active erosion? Answer yes if accelerated erosion is not due to farming operations such as uncontrolled livestock access, stream bank tree clearing or farming too close to unstable banks. Some stream bank erosion is normal and can be attributed to geologic processes beyond the control of the operator.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) Man-made Barriers to Fish Movement: On the land you wish to enroll, are there drop structures, diversions, or culverts on streams and if so, is the drop from upstream to downstream a foot or less? Answer NA if no barriers are present.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) Hydrologic Alteration: Does the land adjacent to your stream channel flood at least once every 2-5 years or if water is diverted or withdrawn, is there adequate residual flow of water to sustain fish and other aquatic animals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment: Forest (≥ 1 acre)

10% of land enrolled in CSP, up to a maximum of 10 acres in a single block, may consist of forest which borders eligible land uses. If you would like to enroll your forest in CSP, answer the following questions to determine if it satisfies NRCS quality criteria for wildlife habitat.

Condition	Yes	No
1) Is the majority of your forest located on hydric soil and is a form of wetland? - If "Yes", skip this assessment and use the wetland assessment below.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) In the forest land, are there 2 or more species present in the overstory and at least 3 species present in the understory, some of which are capable of producing either hard mast (e.g., nuts) or soft mast (e.g., apples, berries)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) Are there 3 or more sizes classes (e.g., seedling, sapling, pole or sawtimber) of trees present and readily observable from most locations within your stand of forest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) Are standing dead or dying trees or trees with cavities present (minimum of 6" diameter and 2 per acre) <u>and</u> is dead and down woody debris readily visible from most locations within your stand of forest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) Is there an obvious browse line due to grazing of domestic animals <u>or</u> is there other disturbance to ground cover and understory vegetation? Note: Normal forestry operations that follow water quality Acceptable Management Practices (AMP) should not be considered disturbance in this question.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment: Wetlands (> 1 acre)

Answers to the following questions will help determine if wetlands satisfy NRCS quality criteria for wildlife habitat.

Condition	Yes	No
1) Have wetlands on your property remained unaltered, <i>or</i> , were legally altered at some time in the past yet water levels are only slightly above or below natural fluctuations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Is there a diversity of wetland plant species (5+) and forms (e.g., submerged, floating, or emergent vegetation, shrubs/trees) represented?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) To your knowledge, do invasive exotic species (e.g., purple loosestrife, phragmites, milfoil) comprise approximately 20% or more of your wetland?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) Is there any disturbance within wetlands caused by domestic grazing animals, <u>or</u> , human use (e.g., ATVs, off-road bikes, etc.) that impacts natural vegetation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5) Does the wetland have vegetated buffers between other land uses such as cropland or pasture?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6) From the middle of a wetland, is there more than 500 feet to the nearest cover?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment: Sugarbush

Answers to the following questions will help determine if production Sugarbush forest satisfies NRCS quality criteria for wildlife habitat. The condition questions apply to all Sugarbush acreages.

Condition	Yes	No
1) Is the stand adjacent to other forest land with a variety of trees and shrubs? Forest land that is beneficial to wildlife will have a variety of trees and shrubs with some that provide either hard mast (e.g., nuts) or soft mast (e.g., apples, berries)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Are there 3 or more sizes classes (e.g., seedling, sapling, pole or sawtimber) of trees present in the stand?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) Are standing dead or dying trees or trees with cavities present (minimum of 6" diameter and 2 per acre) <u>and</u> is dead and down woody debris readily visible from most locations within your stand of forest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) Is there an obvious browse line due to grazing of domestic animals <u>or</u> is there other disturbance to ground cover and understory vegetation? Note: Normal forestry operations that follow water quality Acceptable Management Practices (AMP) should not be considered disturbance in this question.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wildlife Habitat Self Assessment: T+ E Species

Answers to the following questions will help determine if management satisfies NRCS quality criteria for rare, threatened or endangered species. Consult with the local NRCS Field Office to determine whether you have Rare, Threatened or Endangered Species on your property.

Condition	Yes	No
1) Do you limit disturbance in areas known to contain rare, threatened or endangered plant and animal species?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Do you manage habitats of rare, threatened or endangered plant and animal species to maintain, increase or improve current populations, health, or sustainability?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Applicants, please provide the information requested below and sign and date this self-assessment.

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

By signing and dating below, the applicant verifies that the answers to this self assessment are accurate to the best of their ability and is willing to allow NRCS to conduct on-sight verification.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please attach the completed wildlife habitat assessment to your CSP self assessment workbook.

Certification of Review

I have reviewed this other land assessment and the answers meet CSP enrollment criteria for Tier III and are consistent with any farm records provided during the verification:

NRCS Representative: _____

Date: _____

Glossary:

Active Channel Width – The width of the stream at the bank full discharge. Permanent vegetation generally does not become established in the active channel.

Forb – A broad-leaved herbaceous plant, often of importance as food and cover for wildlife. Examples include clover, dandelions, milkweed and chicory.

Forest Size Classes

Seedling - Trees that are less than 4.5 feet tall

Sapling - Trees that are more than 4.5 feet tall but less than 4" dbh

Pole Timber - Trees that are usually more than 4" dbh but less than 10" dbh

Saw Timber - Trees that are more than 10-12" dbh that can be processed into sawlogs

*dbh=diameter of the tree at breast height (4.5 feet from the ground)

Habitat – The physical (soil, rocks, water) and biological (plants and animals) surroundings of an organism.

Hydric Soil - A soil that formed under conditions of saturation, flooding or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions (no oxygen) in the upper part.

Invasive exotic plant species – Plants that disrupt existing vegetation by spreading in an uncontrolled way. These plants are not native to area, tend to grow quickly, readily reproduce and spread rapidly to new sites. Some common invasive species in Vermont include the wetland plants purple loosestrife, European milfoil, and water chestnut. Invasive upland plants include glossy and European buckthorn, various honeysuckles which have hollow piths (central core of stem), barberry, oriental bittersweet, Japanese knotweed (locally known as “bamboo”) and garlic mustard.

Old Field - Annual or perennial vegetation such as grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees where the disturbance pattern is light to moderate. This includes idle lands where there is a woody component.

Overstory – The upper crown canopy of a forest.

Stream - A stream must have a defined channel. **Perennial Stream** is a stream that contains water throughout the year. **Seasonal Stream** is a stream that contains water for only part of the year but more than just during and /or after rainfall or snowmelt.

Seasonal streams do not include any of the following;

Wetlands of any type

Grass or sod channels

Gullies

Roadside ditches

Well, spring or seep

Marsh or swamp
Irrigation canals
Tail water recovery systems

Channel condition – Natural stream channels typically exhibit a meandering channel pattern. Changes to stream flows affect the way a stream naturally does its work. Straightening and downcutting are serious impairments to stream function. Signs of channelization or straightening of the stream may include an unnatural straight section of the stream, high banks, dikes and berms. Vegetation may be missing or sparse. Recovery of stream functions includes stable vegetated banks and a stream developing meanders, recovering from past channelization and downcutting.

Riparian zone vegetation – healthy riparian vegetation is one of the most important elements of a healthy stream system, the wider the better. This question is the width of the natural vegetation from the edge of the channel out into the flood plain. Natural vegetation means native and introduced species that function similar to native species.

Bank stability – some bank erosion is normal in a healthy stream. Outside bends of streams normally have some bare and eroding banks. Excessive bank erosion occurs where riparian zones are degraded or the stream is unstable.

Man-made barriers to fish movement – barriers to fish movement prevent migration of fish, denying breeding and foraging habitats, and isolate populations of fish and other aquatic animals. Man-made barriers can include diversions and other water withdrawal systems. When answering this question evaluate the area proposed to be enrolled.

Hydrologic Alteration – Bankfull flows, as well as flooding, are important to maintaining channel shape and function (e.g., sediment transport) and maintaining the physical habitat for animals and plants. diverted water can move fish and other aquatic animals into unfamiliar territory typically with no outlet or suitable return to the stream system. Screening of irrigation diversions will prevent movement of fish and other aquatic animals into the many irrigation delivery systems.

Understory – In forests, the vegetation that occupies an area between the forest floor and the main canopy of the stand.

Wetlands – Those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, bogs, marshes and other similar areas.

Woodland/Forest land - At least 25% aerial cover by perennial woody plants where the disturbance pattern is light to moderate